

Homily - Sunday, August 10, 2008

19th Sunday - Ordinary Time

Introduction

On Wednesday and Saturday of this week we commemorated the 63rd anniversary of our country's nuclear attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, August 6 and 9, 1945.

Most of us have a general idea of the devastation which those two bombings caused. An estimated 70,000 people - mostly civilians - died from the initial blast in Hiroshima; by the end of 1945 it is estimated that 100,000 people had died; and within five years some 200,000 lost their lives as a result of the bombing and its aftermath.

In Nagasaki about 40,000 were killed immediately and by January of 1946 the toll had risen to some 70,000 dead.

I

This week few of us Americans took much notice of these awful days of infamy in our nation's history. 63 years is not a notable anniversary - like 50 or 75. So it might be understandable that we did not give this August 6 and August 9 much attention.

However, other people did and do remember:

-the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as the mayors of those cities have done every year since the bombings, issued proclamations pleading that a nuclear attack "never again" take place - in their cities or anywhere in the world; the mayors remember

-the Habakasha - survivors of the two attacks - remember as well; they stand as living, conscious witnesses of what was done to them on those two fateful days

(one of the Habakasha, now a Catholic priest, was a 14-year-old, swimming in the river that runs through Hiroshima on that morning of August 6th; he was severely burned and wandered with his family away from the city where they were found by a Jesuit community, among them Fr. Pedro Arrupe, who later became the Superior General of the Jesuit Order; the priests rescued the family, who eventually became Christian; now that boy is 76-year-old Fr. Paul Francis Hasegawa telling the world that he was spared to relate the story of what happened that day)

-the Japanese Constitution also remembers August 6th and 9th 1945; as a result of that terrifying experience and that of the entire war, Article 9 of the Constitution reads as follows: "Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat of use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized"

-a tree in central Hiroshima also remembers: scarred and burned from the nuclear blast, this tree, incredibly, began to bloom in that bitter fall of 1945 and is now called the "Phoenix Tree" (out of the ashes) and stands in the middle of Hiroshima's Peace Park.

II

One theme in today's Gospel is that of fear - an emotion which Jesus does not advise as we have just heard. Twice, he tells his disciples not to be afraid.

However, it's also clear that fear can be salutary. It can warn us of danger to ourselves or to our loved ones; it can help us avoid what will harm us.

In that light the Japanese people today have much fear, judging from reports of friends who have recently visited that country. They fear that the United States could well do it again, that in its final months a desperate U.S. administration - which by the way is pressing Japan to abrogate Article 9 of its Constitution and possibly militarize once again - could launch a nuclear attack somewhere in the world.

Conclusion

Perhaps we Americans need a dose of fear - fear of our own country, for these same reasons. Fear can paralyze, it is true; it can also energize. May it do the latter for us in this election year so that the pleas of Hiroshima and Nagasaki mayors will be heard.